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Coin of the Month

Dating the Shekel of Tyre
(The most likely "30 Pieces of Silver")



Early Shekel of Tyre dated ZK (100/99 B.C.),
minted on wide flan.

The Phoenician god Melqart (probably derived from a Hebrew word meaning "king of the city") was the chief deity of Tyre. He is generally associated with the Greek god Hercules. Melqart's sanctuary in Tyre is believed to have been the model for Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

While Melqart was usually depicted as a bearded figure, wearing a high rounded hat, he is shown clean-shaven on the silver shekels and half shekels which were minted in the Phoenician port city of Tyre for almost 200 years, starting in 126 B.C. He is depicted on the coins wearing a wreath on his head, and he has a lion skin knotted around his neck. Perhaps this clean-cut likeness was partially inspired by the voluminous output of tetradrachms issued by Alexander the Great at Tyre and elsewhere two centuries earlier.

The reverse of the Shekels of Tyre (and half shekels) features an Egyptian-style eagle with its right claw on the beak of a ship (referring to Tyre's maritime industry), and with a palm branch over its right shoulder. A club (also symbol associated with Hercules) appears in the left field with the date above. Additional Greek letters or monograms, referring to magistrates or mintmasters, are above the palm branch, and a Phoenician letter sometimes appears between the eagle's legs. The surrounding Greek inscription is "Tyre the Holy and Inviolable."

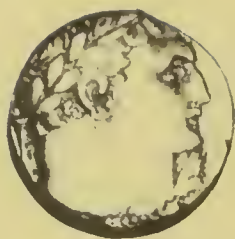
This series of silver coins were all based on an era starting in 126/25 B.C. It was in this year that the wealthy town of Tyre seems to have extracted acknowledgment of its independence from two of the pretenders to the Syrian throne - the son of Demetrius II and the usurper Alexander Zabinas.



Youthful Demetrius II (left),
and usurper Alexander Zabinas (right).

The dating technique, whereby Greek letters represent numbers, is quite similar to the dates found on the Judaean coins of the Procurators. To determine the date, one merely adds the numerical equivalent of the Greek letters to the base year . . . in this instance 126 B.C. If the year is represented by a single letter, it is preceded by the letter "L". If there are two letters or more, their numerical equivalents are added. There follows a table of the Greek alphabet and its numerical equivalents :

| General Coin Form. | Number |
|--------------------|--------|
| A | 1 |
| B | 2 |
| Γ | 3 |
| Δ | 4 |
| Eε | 5 |
| ς | 6 |
| Z | 7 |
| H | 8 |
| Θ | 9 |
| I | 10 |
| K | 20 |
| Λ | 30 |
| M | 40 |
| N | 50 |
| Ξ | 60 |
| O | 70 |
| Π | 80 |
| P | 100 |
| ΣC | 200 |
| T | 300 |
| Υ | 400 |
| Φ | 500 |
| X | 600 |
| Ψ | 700 |
| Ωω | 800 |



Later Shekel of Tyre dated PMΔ (A.D. 18/19), minted on small flan but with same approximate weight as earlier pieces.

The British Museum Collection (BMC) lists over 160 dates and varieties of Tyrian Shekels, and thus this is the reference most often used to attribute these coins (though there are also numerous dates not included in the BMC).

Thus, BMC #53 is dated LA = Year 1 = 126/25 B.C.

And, BMC #75 is dated ΓI = Year 3 + 10 = 13 corresponds to 114/13 B.C.

An interesting date not found in the BMC is PKZ which equals Year 100 + 20 + 7 = 127 = 1 B.C./ 1 A.D.

Therefore, any year past 127 is handled as follows:

PMH = Year 100 + 40 + 8 = 148. Using the first 127 years brings us to 1 B.C./ 1 A.D.; the next 22 years takes us to the minting year of 22/23 A.D.

The exceptional length of issue without any major design change finally came to an end during the First Jewish Revolt (66-70 A.D.). And just when the Tyrian Shekels were disappearing from circulation, the Jews minted their own silver shekels and half shekels for the first time . . . using the melted Tyrian coins that had been collected and stored in the Jerusalem Temple's Treasury. Even the Hebrew inscription on the Jewish Shekels, proclaiming "Jerusalem the Holy," may have well been inspired by the Greek legend on the coins which they had replaced - "Tyre the Holy and Inviolable."



Half Shekel of Tyre dated PΞH (42/43 B.C.)

LEGENDS OF THE "THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER"

by Sir George F. Hill

Originally published in 1920, this is now an extremely rare work missing from most numismatic reference libraries. We are pleased to reprint this important and fascinating work in its entirety, starting with this issue.

Hill was Keeper of the Coin Cabinet of the British Museum, where he compiled the BMC volume on the coins of ancient Palestine, which continues to be a classic in its field.

That the incident of the Betrayal of Christ for Thirty Pieces of Silver should have had an attraction for the medieval maker of legends, and that pieces professing to be the original coins received by Judas should have been treasured as relics, are hardly matters for surprise. There is no lack of literature on the legend which was woven round the story of the Thirty Pieces, and of late years two or three writers have devoted some attention to the supposed relics of the Betrayal. A comparison and analysis of the various forms of the legend have, however, not been instituted, so far as I have been able to discover. As to the relics, the material for study is only to be found in foreign periodicals and works not generally accessible. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to make some attempt to trace the development of the legend, and to collect the descriptions of the coins which were or are preserved in various sanctuaries.



Joseph sold by his brethren.

The earliest extant work in which I have been able to find the legend in a fully developed form is the Pantheon of Godfrey of Viterbo, who died in 1191. He gives it in one of his Latin poems in rhyming three-line stanzas. Freely translated, and somewhat abridged, Godfrey's account is as follows: "Ninus, King of the Assyrians, had these coins made, and it was Terah who fashioned them out of gold; with them the Ninivite king set up his market. The face of the King was stamped on these denarii to furnish an example to all time, and to perpetuate his own likeness. The son of this Terah, called Abram, afterwards took away these coins with his wife Sara when, at God's bidding, he went into Canaan. With these coins he bought land from the men of Jericho; with these also Joseph was bought by the Ishmaelites; these did wealthy Pharaoh keep in his treasury. These also the mighty Sibyl, the Queen Nicaula, possessed; even the Queen of the South, who afterwards from the Court of Solomon gave them, a reverent offering, to the Temple. But Nebuchadnezzar, when he spoiled the Temple, carried them away to Babylon, where they were given as pay for soldiers to the kings in Saba. When the three Magi together brought their three gifts, the scripture of the ancients records that the kings whom the strange star called forth brought these coins to God. But when, taught by angelic warnings, these kings had gone home, a most worthy garment was sent down from heaven for the Child; without seam was it, and of wondrous hue. His Father sent it from heaven; no woman span it; it became longer as the Child grew in stature. Now when Herod commanded that the Child should be sought out to be slain, His Mother in fear of death fled to the land of the Nile and lay hidden there. Then these three gifts were left in that hiding-place, the gold, frankincense and myrrh, and the blessed garment of God. Some shepherds came and carried away the gifts. But there was a certain astrologer who removed the gifts which had been left behind. He knew by the stars all the portents of Christ's coming; he was an Armenian, just and honourable. Now in the time when Christ was teaching, an angel said to this man: Render up the gifts of God which thou hast taken; let the sacred gifts of God be restored to Him. So the short tunic of the Child was given back, and as Jesus put it on it became of full size. The man saw it, and his mind was troubled and astonished. The thirty denarii which they had brought to God they gave, at the behest of Jesus, to the treasury of the Temple, which denarii they say Judas afterwards received as his price. After the death of Christ Judas brought them back and cast them down in repentance, and hanged himself and burst asunder. Then they gave fifteen denarii for the Potter's Field, and as many to the soldiers who guarded the tomb by night. Perchance thou thinkest, reader, that my words agree not together, since I have written that those coins were of gold; for the Book speaks of silver. Mark said that the Lord was bought for silver; of coins or of a talent of gold he spoke not. But it is even as I have said; for it was the custom of the ancients to use more than one name for gold, and to call different metals by the name of silver.

This writer and Pseudo-Ephraim, the author of the Cave of the Treasures, deal in great detail with the history of the treasures brought from Paradise. Adam took from the borders of Paradise gold, myrrh, and frankincense, and placed them in a cave, and blessed it, and consecrated it, so that it should be the house of prayer for him and for his sons, and called it the Cave of the Treasures. The Gnostic Apocalypse of Adam connects these treasures definitely with the Magi: "And we sealed this Testament, and placed it in the Cave of the Treasures, where it remains unto this day, with the treasures that Adam had taken from Paradise, the gold, the myrrh, and the incense. And the sons of the Magian kings shall come, shall take them, and shall bear them to the Son of God, in the grotto of Bethlehem of Judah."

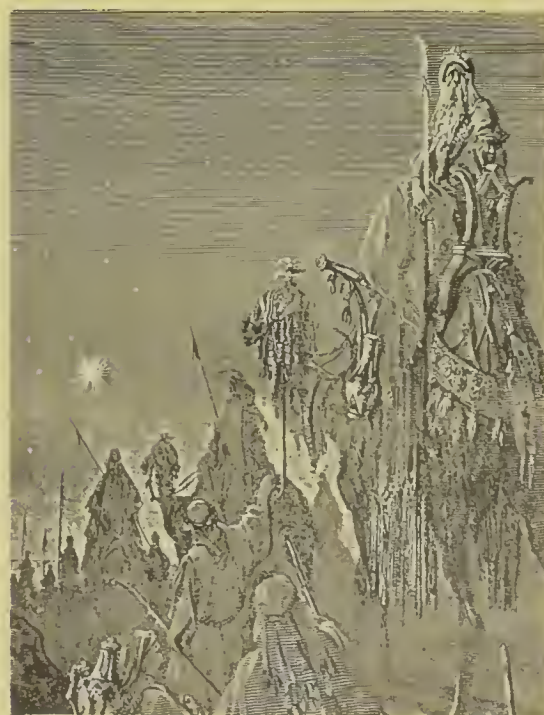
Solomon of Basra refers to the belief that the gifts brought by the Magi were descended from Adam only to condemn it as not received by the Church. The legend itself, as he gives it, is briefly this: Terah

made these pieces for Abraham; Abraham gave them to Isaac; Isaac bought a village with them; the owner of the village carried them to Pharaoh; Pharaoh sent them to Solomon, who placed them round about the door of the altar. Nebuchadnezzar, struck by their beauty, carried them off. He gave them to Persian youths who were at Babylon as hostages, and these youths, being released by

Nebuchadnezzar, carried them to their parents. From Persia the Magi brought them with the other gifts. On their way, when near Edessa, the kings fell asleep by the wayside, and when they went on they left the coins behind. Certain merchants found them and brought them to the neighbourhood of Edessa. On that same day an angel appeared to the shepherds and gave them the seamless garment. The shepherds, taking this garment, met the merchants, and an exchange was made. The merchants went into Edessa with the garment, and the King Abgarus sent to them and asked if they had anything meant for kings, that he might buy it. When he saw the garment he asked whence they had it, and on learning the facts sent for the shepherds. Thus he acquired both the garment and the coins, and sent them to Christ for the good which He had done him in healing his sickness. Christ kept the garment but sent the pieces to the Jewish treasury. The priests gave them to Judas, and the rest follows as in the gospel.

I have said that this version differs considerably from that of Godfrey of Viterbo. Nevertheless there can be no doubt of their common origin; they begin and end alike; the seamless garment is associated with the coins in the same mysterious way. Godfrey's Armenian astrologer corresponds to King Abgarus. But we miss the attractive episode of the presentation of the coins to the infant Christ and the losing of them by the Virgin.

Of course the discovery of other Syriac versions may throw new light on the development of the legend. But with the present evidence we are probably justified in supposing that the ultimate source of both Godfrey's and Solomon's stories would be found in a comparatively simple form in Pseudo-Bartholomew. Possibly the minute germ from which the connexion of the coins with the Magi sprang is to be found in the well known Apocryphal Gospel of Matthew. The date of this apocryph is not later than the fourth century after Christ. Here in chapter xvi we read: "then they opened their treasures, and gave exceeding great gifts to Mary and Joseph. But to the Child Himself they each offered one gold coin. After these, one offered gold, the second frankincense, and the third myrrh."



The three wise men.

The picturesque effect of these three coins would appeal to the mythopoeic faculty. It would be easy to multiply them by ten. And once connected with the Magi, with all the mysterious traditions that involved the Kings of the East, it would be but natural to take the history of the coins back to the time when the Sabaeen land previously played a part in Biblical history, i.e. to the time of the Queen of Sheba. Possibly also the tradition that the Magi were descended from Abraham by Keturah may have made it easy to carry the story of the coins back as far as Abraham.

This, however, is mere speculation. Let us return to the legend itself.

In the third quarter of the fourteenth century a great vogue was given to the story by two writers, Ludolph of Suchem and John of Hildesheim. The latter, a Carmelite friar, is better known, but the priority seems to rest with Ludolph. His *de Itinere Terrae Sanctae* was dedicated to Baldwin of Steinfurt, Bishop of Paderborn, a fact which dates it before 1361. Internal evidence and comparison with the 'Book of Cologne' show that it is later than 1350. Ludolph, according to his own statement, was in the Holy Land from 1336 to 1341.

He gives as his authority (chapter xxxix) the History of the Kings of the East. The coins were some of a number made for Ninus by Terah, who received thirty of them *pro suo salario*, a pleasing touch. Abraham spent them in his exile, and they came into the hands of the Ishmaelites. The Ishmaelites bought Joseph with them, and with them Joseph's brethren bought corn out of Egypt. Afterwards they were sent into the land of Saba to buy merchandise for Pharaoh. The Queen of Sheba brought them to Solomon, and they were placed in the Temple; thence they were carried off by Nebuchadnezzar, who gave them to the King of Godolia. There they remained until, at the time of birth of Christ, the kingdom of Godolia was transferred to the kingdom of Nubia. Melchior brought them to Christ, because older and nobler gold than this he found none in his treasury. They were lost by Mary when she fled to Egypt in the Balsam Garden; and there they were found by a certain shepherd, who kept them until the time of the Passion approached. Falling ill and hearing of the works of Christ, this shepherd came to Him and was cured. The rest of the story agrees with the account as given in Godfrey of Viterbo; but there is no excursus on the sacred garment, nor are we told what the coins were like. The discrepancy between the metals is briefly explained. Finally we are told that when the predestined object of the denarii was fulfilled, they were immediately separated and dispersed.



Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba.

'Ludolph's book was meant for pilgrims and those interested in their journeys. John of Hildesheim appealed to an audience perhaps even wider. His *Liber de gestis ac trina beatissimorum trium regum translacione* was dedicated to and written at the bidding of Florentius of Wevelinghoven or Wevelkoven, Bishop of Munster. Florentius held that see from 1364 to 1379, and, as John died at Marienau in 1375, the date of the composition is fixed between 1364 and 1375. It appeared in a German translation as early as 1389. In modern times attention was called to it by Goethe.

The account given by John in chapters xxviii, xxix, is very full. I have space to note only the chief points of interest.

The source of the story of the offering of the coins by Melchior is described as the *libri Indorum*. After the death of Jacob, Joseph sent the coins to the kingdom of Saba for spices to bury his father, and they were placed in the treasury of the Sabaeen kings. Then, just as Godfrey and Ludolph relate, they found their way to the Temple of Jerusalem. In the time of Rehoboam, in the taking of Jerusalem and the spoiling of the Temple, they came into the hands of the King of the Arabians, who was then an ally of the Egyptians, and thus into the royal treasury of Arabia. Melchior, King of Nubia and of the Arabians, brought, together with many other precious gifts, these thirty denarii, since older and nobler gold in his treasury he found none. These only he offered to our Lord, passing over the other gifts in his fear (as described in chapter xxii). The treasures (i.e. the coins, frankincense, and myrrh) were taken by the Virgin, wrapped up in a linen cloth, and lost on her flight into Egypt. They were found by a Bedouin shepherd. He kept them until, shortly before the Passion, he fell into an incurable disease. Hearing of the fame of Jesus, he came to Him, and was cured and converted. He offered the gifts to Jesus; but Jesus knew them and bade him put them on the altar. And the priest burnt the frankincense, and put the myrrh with the coins in the treasury. In order that all the Jews indifferently should be responsible for the Passion and death of Christ, the priest took the coins out of the common treasury and gave them to Judas. Part of the myrrh was mixed with the vinegar offered to Christ on the cross, and the rest was given by Nicodemus for the embalming of the body. The coins when returned by Judas were divided, as we have learned they were from Godfrey and Ludolph. A description follows of the cemetery in the Potter's Field; also we have Godfrey's ingenious explanation of the discrepancy between Gospel and legend as to the metal of the coins, given in a more elaborate and confused form. They were called by the general name *argentei*, just as gold denarii are now called *scuti mutones* or florins. The type, weight, and appearance of the coins in use from the time of Abraham down to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian remained, we are assured, unchanged, and in all parts of the East coins never alter their weight or value. Then comes an obscure passage on the garment of Christ: the style and size of the seamless garment have remained in hereditary use among very many princes and nobles down to the writer's day. Each of the thirty pieces is said to be worth about three florins; and on one side are Chaldaic letters which modern men cannot read or decipher.

The early German translation of John's book already mentioned presents certain small variations, of which perhaps the only one worth recording is that Potiphar, Pharaoh's chamberlain, is said to have bought Joseph directly from his brethren with these coins.

It will be observed that John differs from the other writers in saying that the Egyptians, not Nebuchadnezzar, carried off the coins in the reign of Rehoboam, i.e. when Shishak took Jerusalem.

To Be Continued Next Month